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# A Comparative Study of Higher Education Reforms of three Central Asian Countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

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**A Comparative Study of Higher Education Reforms of three Central Asian  
Countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

by

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Master's Project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the degree of Master of Education

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## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate my Master's Project from University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA to my beloved parents, father Tashbolot and mother Buaiym, whose heartfilled generosity taught me to love and care for humanity and without whose wisdom and spiritual support, my ambition to get sophisticated education in USA would have remained an unrealized dream.**

**To my lovely sons Edil and Emil, whose patience and blessings inspired me to complete the program.**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of my research is to analyze the history, current status, and the further development of higher education in three Central Asian countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The focus of my research is Kyrgyzstan, my home country; however, higher education reforms of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are also important for comparative study. My study addresses the nature of the reforms in higher education system being implemented in these countries.

The research seeks to answer the following questions: (a) to identify the main changes in higher education systems since gaining independence; (b) to identify the key issues of on-going reforms in higher education sector; (c) to determine the main factors influencing the changes in the systems; and (d) to identify the perspectives of the higher education reforms of these three Central Asian countries. The research concerns whether Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan will have similar or different higher education systems in the future.

The study included document analysis, an on-line survey, interviews, observation and personal experience. My working hypothesis is that higher education of Kyrgyzstan has changed dramatically since 1992, but with various problems and mistakes in the process. Meanwhile, higher education system of Kazakhstan has achieved greater success in terms of modernization or westernization of the system. In contrast, the higher education system of Uzbekistan has made an effort to develop their own higher education system but the attempts seem not to be successful since the system retains most of the characteristics of the Soviet-based system.

The subjects of the on-line survey are the students and faculty members from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan who have studied in the United States university systems in the recent years or currently participate in international educational programs. The respondents were contacted through the e-mail and asked to complete an anonymous on-line survey. The survey was available online in the form of an attachment.

The findings of the research demonstrate the similarities and differences of the higher education systems in three Central Asian countries. Historical development, current status, and the planned tendencies of higher education systems' development provide a good understanding of the three nations.

## **Section I**

### **Introduction**

Higher education plays an important role in the development process of three Central Asian countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Reforms in higher education are important factors that lead these countries during their transition period. This research makes a contribution to the on-going reforms in higher education in my home country, Kyrgyzstan. In the research I make an attempt to analyze the reforms of higher education systems of three countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan by comparing the impact of the reforms.

Comparative analysis of Kyrgyzstan higher education reforms in contrast to the reforms of higher education of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan provides wider perspectives to understand the similarities in historical development of these countries as states, culture, language, religion and political structures of the countries.

The primary religious faith of these three Central Asian countries is Islam. All these three countries speak languages which belong to the Turkic group of languages. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were under control of Russia for the last 120 years. According to history in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tsarist Russia occupied all these three countries. In the first years of the Soviet power, these Central Asian countries were consolidated under one name “Turkestan” or Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In the 1920-30s these nations were divided into three Republics of the USSR. This was the formal separation of the nations into three separate republics until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Close to the end of 1991, all three republics declared their independence from the Soviet Union: on August 31, Kyrgyzstan; on September 1, Uzbekistan; and on December 16, Kazakhstan (World Factbook 2002, 2003). Political, economic and structural independence from Russia led these three countries into different ways of development.

Thus, these three countries had much in common in the past. Comparative analysis of higher education system reforms of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan



will produce important findings not only for Kyrgyzstan higher education system but also for the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan higher education systems as well.



Source: <http://www.askasia.org/image/maps/centasia1.htm>, January 2004

## Section II

### GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF KYRGYZSTAN, KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

#### Introduction

After about 300 years of Tatar-Mongol rule in the land of the Russians, Russia became a powerful nation. Tsarist Russia was an Empire during the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and Russians occupied the lands of their former invaders, Tatars or Turkic speaking peoples. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire occupied most of the Kazakh lands, and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia invaded the whole territory of Central Asian khanates. Since those times, the current territories of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were a part of the Russian Empire until the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in St. Petersburg. Then the Communists held rule over the countries, which lasted for over 70 years.

The Communist regime was not a desired society for all three countries. Some of the patriots fought against Soviet power for years, but their resistance was suppressed by the Soviets. Most of them had to become a part of the new Communist ruled state, the Soviet Union. Most of the opponents of the Soviet power had to leave their historical lands for other lands in order to find refuge. Most of them had to move to Afghanistan<sup>1</sup> and Eastern Turkestan, northwest of current China.

During the 1930s, all three Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics shifted their economies from private into collective and state economy. The opponents were treated as “enemies of people” and severely punished by the Stalinist regime. There was a Cultural Revolution after the establishment of Soviet power in Central Asia. In those times, all the religious institutions were abolished and destroyed, including the educational establishments. Instead, other new Soviet schools were established in the countries. People who were educated in the traditional educational establishments were labeled as an illiterate part of the population

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan is *Ooganystan* in Kyrgyz language that is literally translated into English as “land of refugees.” Historically the territory of current Afghanistan was the place of asylum for the many central Asian peoples therefore there are a lot of ethnic groups in this country including Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh.

Women were forced to go to schools by the rulers of new state, but this policy faced resistance from the local population, especially among the Uzbek population.

Unlike the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who had had a mostly nomadic and less religious background, the Uzbeks were more religious and followed the Islamic traditions. This was the main reason for resistance against the new policy that required all women to receive an education.

The Uzbeks are considered to be the most religious people among the three nations. For instance, the Encyclopedia Britannica describes Uzbeks as: “The Uzbeks, especially the urban Uzbeks are considered to be the most religious Muslims of Central Asia; early marriages for young girls, bride-price, and religious marriages and burials are among the traditions still practiced. The Uzbeks are the least russified of those Turkic peoples formerly ruled by the Soviet Union” (NEB, 2002, p. 225). The Uzbeks follow a more strict adherence to Islam than the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz. Even the atheistic policy of the Communists had little effect on changing their attitude to religion.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education for women was not common among the Muslims of Central Asia. On the other hand, it was difficult to force the Kyrgyz and Kazakh people to change their traditional nomadic style of life into a settled way of life. Although the positive impacts of the Soviet Union on the Central Asian economy and education are important, the negative impacts on culture, language, national identity of peoples and the environment is worth discussion. For instance, russification of education, mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, ignored environmental issues, using the lands for nuclear weapon testing in Kazakhstan, enlarging the cotton plantation in Uzbekistan, both of which produced a global environmental problem in the last century. Another example about Kazakhstan: “[T]he Soviets continued the tsarist policy of encouraging large numbers of Russians and other Slavs to settle in the region. ... Owing to the regions intensive agricultural development and its use as a testing ground for nuclear weapons, serious environmental problems developed by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century”(NEB, 2002, p. 775). Thus, the Soviets had not only positive but also negative impact on culture, social development and environment of the Central Asian peoples.

The most difficult time of the Soviet period was the World War II years or the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. During 1941-45, all three nations had lost thousands of people. Thus, the number of casualties was 410,000 in Kazakhstan alone (Historical

Calendar, 1999). While the soldiers were killed in the battlefields with the fascist Germans, other people in the countries were dying from starvation and inhuman living conditions. Social life development was slow in those times, but industry was still growing. However, most of the industrial and agricultural products were used for military purposes.

After the victory of WWII, the economy and the social life of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan grew rapidly. According to the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, in 1975 the quantum of output of industry surpassed the level of 1940 by 13 times in Uzbekistan, by 27 times in Kazakhstan, and by 29 times in Kyrgyzstan. The literacy rate of the three republics' populations in 1970 increased to 99.7 percent. In 1939 the literacy was 83.6 percent in Kazakhstan, 78.7 percent in Uzbekistan, and 78.9 percent in Kyrgyzstan. The number of higher education institutions had also increased. The number of students in 49 Kazakh universities and institutes was 216,1000 students, in 42 Uzbek higher education institutions there were 246,000 students, and in nine Kyrgyz universities and institutes there were 50, 100 students (GSE, 1975). Even though the Soviet statistics were not very accurate, the approximate figures of the changes in economy and education are dramatic.

The graduates of Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uzbek high schools were encouraged to study at the higher education institutions in the European part of the Soviet Union, particularly in the big cities of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Baltic countries. The educational institutions of the mentioned republics of the former Soviet Union were leading and prestigious. The educational structure was centralized and labeled "Central Higher Education Institutions of the Soviet Union." Most of the graduates of the centralized universities and institutes became Communist party leaders and had leading official positions in their respective countries.

However, all the ideological and political efforts of the Soviet Union could not keep the 15 Soviet republics together longer than 74 years. In the mid 1980s, the General Secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, Michael Gorbachev, suddenly changed the policy into a new democratic society. Ultimately, 15 republics of Soviet Union got independence in the early 1990s. Most of the 15 republics' Communist party leaders preferred to choose their own ways of development. In this period, all three

Central Asian republics gained their independence. Thus, in 1991 Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan declared their independence.

## **General Comparison of the Countries**

### **Introduction**

The findings of the research say that the three neighboring countries of Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have differences along with similarities. The similarities are: all the three languages belong to the Turkic group of languages; history links the nations with each other; and the infrastructure of the countries was the same during the last century. Nevertheless, there are many differences between the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uzbek nations and their countries.

Table 1 includes the main data about the three countries that give you a general picture of the differences and similarities of the countries.

<b>Table 1: Main data of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan</b>			
	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>Uzbekistan</b>
<b>Independence</b>	31 August 1991	16 December 1991	1 September 1991
<b>Total area</b>	198,500 sq. km	2,717,300 sq. km	447,400 sq. km
<b>Population</b> (July 2002 est.)	4,822,166	16,741,519	25,563,441
<b>Religions (%)</b>	Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5%	Muslim 47%, Russian Orthodox 44%, Protestant 2%, other 7%	Muslim 88%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, other 3%
<b>Unemployment</b>	7% (1999 est.)	10% (2001 est.)	10% plus 20% underemployed (1999)
<b>Budget</b>	<i>revenues: \$207.4 million expenditures: \$238.7 million, including capital expenditures of \$NA (1999 est.)</i>	<i>revenues: \$4.2 billion expenditures: \$5.1 billion, including capital expenditures of \$NA (2001 est.)</i>	<i>revenues: \$4 billion expenditures: \$4.1 billion, including capital expenditures of \$NA (1999 est.)</i>
<b>GDP</b>	purchasing power parity - \$13.5 billion (2001 est.)	purchasing power parity - \$98.1 billion (2001 est.)	purchasing power parity - \$62 billion (2001 est.)
<b>GDP real growth rate (2001 est.)</b>	5%	12%	3%
<b>GDP per capita (2001 est.)</b>	purchasing power parity - \$2,800	purchasing power parity - \$5,900	purchasing power parity - \$2,500
<b>Inflation rate (%) (2001 est.)</b>	7%	9%	23%
<b>Exchange rates</b>	<i>soms</i> per US dollar - 47.972 (Jan.2002), 17.362 (1997)	<i>tenge</i> per US dollar - 151.14 (Jan. 2002), 75.44 (1997)	<i>sums</i> per US dollar – 687.0 (Jan.2002), 75.8 (Sep. 1997)
<b>Internet users</b>	51,600 (2001)	100,000 (2002)	150,000 (2002)

Source: World Factbook 2002 (2003) Retrieved March 9, 2003 from the Central Intelligence Agency Web site: [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields)

## **Differences between Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

Despite many similarities in historical background, culture, religion, languages and geography, each of these three countries has its own differences and peculiarities. Thus, most territory of Kazakhstan is steppe, whereas Kyrgyzstan is the most mountainous country, and Uzbekistan is the most agricultural country among the three countries. The following paragraphs are devoted to brief descriptions of each country.

### **Kyrgyz Republic**

#### **General Information**

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country; its highest point is 7,439 meters. The total area of Kyrgyzstan is 198,500 square kilometers. The country borders with China on the east and southeast, with Kazakhstan on the north, with Uzbekistan on the east and southeast, and with Tajikistan on the south. Though the economy of Kyrgyzstan is not as developed as the economy of Kazakhstan, its natural resources are extensive. Kyrgyzstan possesses such natural resources as gold, rare earth metals, coal, oil, and other deposits of mercury, bismuth, lead, and zinc. There is also the largest natural growth of walnut forest in the world. The population of Kyrgyzstan is nearly 5 million people (4,822,166, July 2002). The population of Kyrgyzstan, like the population of Kazakhstan, is very multiethnic. The major ethnic group of the country is Kyrgyz, which is 52.4 percent. The rest of the population consists of different ethnic groups, as Russians, 18%; Uzbeks, 12,9%; Ukrainians, 2,5%; German, 2,4%; and other 11,8% different ethnic groups. Unlike the other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan has two official languages, Kyrgyz and Russian (World Factbook, 2002, 2003).

#### **History**

The Kyrgyz are one of the most ancient peoples in Central Asia. In the ancient times, Kyrgyz people lived not only in the current territory of Kyrgyzstan but they also lived in Siberia. For example, a brief historical description of Kyrgyzstan suggests:

The territory of Kyrgyzstan is one of the ancient centres of human civilization, ... The Kyrgyz were known in Central Asia since the first millennium BC and have carried their name throughout the centuries. ... In the 4-3 centuries BC the ancient Kyrgyz were part of strong nomadic tribal unions which proved to be a serious distress to China. It was at that time when construction of the Great Chinese Wall began. In the 2-1 centuries BC a part of the Kyrgyz tribes moved to Enisey ("Ene sai" translates as "Mother river" from the Kyrgyz language) and Baikal ("Bai kol" in Kyrgyz means "Abundant Lake"). It was there that the Kyrgyz tribes organized

their first state and the Kyrgyz Khanate, which became the centre for consolidation of the Kyrgyz and formation of its culture (History, 2001).

Despite the smallest population and the smallest area of territory among the three Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan has the longest and deepest historical roots.

### **Education**

Education in Kyrgyzstan was religious before the occupation of Russians. There were *mektebs* for the pre-higher education schools and *madrasas* for higher education in pre-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. After the occupation by Tsarist Russia, the Russians opened some Russian – Kyrgyz schools for the Kyrgyz people. The Soviet encyclopedia describes these schools as progressive: “In 1880’s a network of Russian schools emerged. In objective terms, they played a somewhat progressive role, inasmuch as they acquainted Kyrgyz youth with Russian language and Russian culture. .... In prerevolutionary Kirghizia there were 107 schools with 7,000 students, only 574 of whom were Kirghiz, all of them the children of *bais* and *manaps* [rich and wealthy people]” (GSE, 1976, p.520). After the October Revolution, in 1917 the education system changed to the Soviet style. Education had become free of charge and it changed from a religious to a secular system. The reforms in education started one year after the socialist revolution.

The following sentence is an example for the beginning of reform in Kyrgyz education system: “The Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan Republic (of which Kirghizia was a part in that period) confirmed the Statute on Organizing Public Education in the Turkestan Region (Aug. 17, 1918) and issued a declaration on the introduction of universal free education in the native language and on the secularization of schools in the republic” (GSE, 1973, p.495).

During the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz language alphabet had changed twice. In 1927 the Arabic script was changed into the Latin based alphabet, then in 1940 the Latin script was replaced with the Cyrillic based alphabet. The first Soviet based higher education establishments were opened in 1919 in the south of the country. They were called *technicums*, which were most similar to the equivalent of American colleges. “The first teachers’ training courses were opened in the middle of 1919, the Osh and Dzhahal-Abad pedagogical technicums in 1924 and 1925, the Central Pedagogical Technicum in 1926, and the first higher educational institution – the Kirghiz State Pedagogical Institute – in 1932” (GSE, 1973, p.495).



The number of educational establishments had increased rapidly. In the beginning of the 1970s, the total number of vocational, technical, and higher educational institutions was 100 with 83,500 students. Among them there were nine main higher educational institutions: Kyrgyz university, agricultural institute, the polytechnic institute, the institute of art, the medical institute, the physical culture institute, the women's pedagogical institute, and Osh and Prezhevalsk pedagogical institutes. Higher education was concentrated in the capital city only, and access to higher education in the provinces was not easy. Seven out of the nine Kyrgyz higher educational establishments were located in the capital city Frunze (Bishkek) (GSE, 1973, pp.495, 496).

After gaining independence in 1991, the education system of Kyrgyzstan started a new way of development. Decentralization of education and changes in curricula were the main purposes of changes in the system.

In spite of the economic crisis in the country, the numbers of higher educational establishments has increased rapidly. The total number of higher educational institutions increased from 13 in 1992 to 138 in 2001. The total number of students changed from 53,700 in 1992 to 207,400 in 2001. There was no private university in 1992, and now there are 15. However, the overall quality of education got worse in most Kyrgyz universities. Nevertheless, in some newly created universities the quality of education seems to be comparable to the average western universities because they were based on standards and curricula of western countries. Currently, there are seven international universities in Kyrgyzstan and half of them western-oriented: American University in Central Asia (formerly American University in Kyrgyzstan), Manas Kyrgyz-Turkish University, Kyrgyz-Turkish Ala Too International University and Kyrgyz-Kuwait University. The rest of the inter-state universities are developed with the former Soviet Union countries, Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavic) University, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, and Kyrgyz-Russian Education Academy (Jusenbaev & Ruskulueva, 2002).

Another positive step was the creation of a new system of admission to the state based universities with the support of American Council for International Education ACTR/ACCELS. In summer of 2002, the first piloting of this system of testing occurred. 25 testing centers were organized in Kyrgyzstan. Forty educators were trained in Washington to administer the tests. This innovation seems to help to avoid corruption,

which is critical in current public higher education of Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyzstan Independent Testing Organization, July 2002).

Generally speaking, the reforms in higher education are promising. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity to develop educational system of Kyrgyzstan and other fields of the society in their own way.

## **Republic of Kazakhstan**

### **General information**

Kazakhstan is the second largest country of the former Soviet Union republics after Russia. Its area is 2,724,900 square km (1,052,100 sq. miles). Kazakhstan borders the Russian Federation, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan is a multinational and multiethnic country. The main languages in the country are Kazakh and Russian. There are many other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. Most of the different ethnic groups were deported from the northern Caucasus and other parts of Russia during the rule of Stalin before and after World War II. For instance, the official website of Kazakhstan describes this era as, “1937 – 1951: Deportation of whole nations to Kazakhstan: Koreans, Germans, Karachays, Chechens, Ingushes, Balkars, Kabardines, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, Meshet Turks of Georgia, Ukrainians, Greeks Georgians, etc.” (Historical Calendar, 1999). Currently the Kazakh population in Kazakhstan is 53.4 percent<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, although the Kazakh language is an official language, the Russian language remains the dominant language in the country.

On December 12, 1991, the Kazakhstani parliament proclaimed the republic's independence from the U.S.S.R. Since this time Kazakhstan has been developing in a certain unique way.

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<sup>2</sup>World Factbook 2002: Kazakhstan. People Ethnic groups: Kazakh (Qazaq) 53.4%, Russian 30%, Ukrainian 3.7%, Uzbek 2.5%, German 2.4%, Uighur 1.4%, other 6.6% (1999 census). Retrieved February, 2004, from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html#People>

Overall, Kazakhstan is a more Russified country than Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan. An American writer, Huntington, in his novel *The clash of civilizations* attributes Kazakhstan to the “Orthodox civilization” in the map of “The World Civilization: Post 1990.” Meanwhile the future civilizations of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan belong to the Islamic civilization (Huntington, 1996).

## **History**

Kazakhs are the second largest Turkic-speaking people after Uzbeks in Central Asia. Kazakh people were mainly nomads. Kazakhs consider themselves as descendents of three main divisions, the Great, Middle, and Little hordes that occupied the current territory of Kazakhstan (Britannica, p.774). In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a nomadic empire of Kazakhs which controlled the whole territory of current Kazakhstan and part of Russia. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the khanate weakened and the Russians started to invade the Kazakhs’ lands. In 1848 the khanate was completely occupied by the Russian colonists. Since this time, the Kazakh lands became Russian. For example, the first capital of Kazakhstan was Orenburg that is currently situated in the territory of Russia. Orenburg had the status of capital of Kazakhstan from August 1920 to February 1925.

## **Education**

Before the Russian occupation there were mostly religious educational establishments in Kazakhstan. For the secondary or pre-college education, the schools were called *maktabs*, and for higher education, *madrasas*. For instance, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia describes the education system before the 19<sup>th</sup> century as: “Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kazakhstan had only Muslim schools – maktabs and madrasas – where children were taught written Arabic and the dogmas of Islam. These schools trained mainly religious ministers. After unification with Russia, which was completed in the 1860’s, the first secular Kazakh schools were opened. ... By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two instructional systems in Kazakhstan: the schools for the children of the Russian administration and the prosperous Kazakh other non-Russian population and the religious schools. In the 1914-15 academic year there were 2,006 schools, with 105,000 pupils only 7,900 of whom were Kazakhs” (NEB, 2002). Kazakhs used the Arabic script until 1928, and then transferred into the Latin script. In 1940, however, the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan decided to shift the alphabet from the Latin to Cyrillic script.

The first Soviet-based Kazakh higher educational institution was founded in 1928 in Alma-Ata, the former capital city of Kazakhstan. By the beginning of the 1970s, there were 44 higher educational institutions with 200,500 students in Kazakhstan (GSE, 1976). All the higher educational institutions were tuition-free.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the education system of Kazakhstan faced some difficulties. The main reasons for this crisis were: (a) economic crisis, (b) emigration of Russian speaking population, and (c) transformation from the Soviet centralized system to the market oriented system. A number of private universities are functioning in Kazakhstan nowadays. Thus, according to the report of Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan for UNESCO, the total number of higher educational institutions in the country is 59, which include 22 private and 37 public institutions (Zhakenov, 2002). Tuition fee for higher education in Kazakhstan is the most expensive in Central Asia; it varies from \$700 to \$1,500 USD for one academic year (Programs: Kazakhstan, 2003). Although the economic situation in the country defines the price for any service, the high tuition fee for higher education indicates something about the popularity of higher education in the country.

In the first years of independence, Kazakhstan also faced considerable problems in all fields of the society. Nevertheless, independence gave Kazakhstan considerable positive changes in social development. Post-Soviet Kazakhstan has chosen its own way of development and tries to compete with other developed countries.

## **Republic of Uzbekistan**

### **General Information**

Uzbekistan has the largest population in Central Asia. Its population is 25,563,441 people (July, 2002 est.). Though Uzbekistan differs from its Kazakh and Kyrgyz neighbors in terms of its ethnic composition, Uzbekistan is still considered a multiethnic country. The Uzbeks are the largest ethnic group of the country, which consists of 80 percent of the total population. The rest of the minor ethnic groups are Russians, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks. Uzbekistan borders with Kazakhstan on the north, with Kyrgyzstan on the east and southeast, with Tajikistan and Afghanistan on the south, and with Turkmenistan on the southeast. The economy of Uzbekistan is relatively strong in the Central Asian region. The country's main product is cotton. Uzbekistan is second

in the world in exporting cotton. The country is rich in such mineral resources such as oil, natural gas and gold. However, the country keeps the Soviet-style economic system in which the government controls most industry and establishes price policy (World Factbook 2002, 2003). State control in Uzbekistan is strong in the education system as well.

## **Education**

In comparison with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the education system of Uzbekistan was more developed before the Russian invasion. In the current territory of Uzbekistan, religious education had flourished for centuries. For instance, Encyclopedia Britannica describes the Uzbekistani education history as: “Over the centuries Uzbekistan has been a noted center of Muslim culture. Outstanding medieval scholars who came from there are now known as Uzbekistan include Musa Khwarezmi, a 9<sup>th</sup>-century mathematician; Abu Reikhan al-Beruni (973 – 1048), a 10<sup>th</sup>-century polymath and philosopher; Ulugh Beg, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century astronomer who built an observatory at Samarkand; and the late 15<sup>th</sup>-century poet Ali Shir Navai” (NEB, 2002, p. 226). In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tsarist Russia occupied Uzbekistan and the situation changed dramatically. The Uzbek education retains the traditions of their ancestors which included the religious educational establishments as, *maktabs*, and *madrasas* before the October Revolution of 1917. The Islamic educational establishments did not encourage the education of woman. Secular schools were founded by the Russians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the Soviet encyclopedia of 1975, only 500 Uzbek students were enrolled in technical schools (GSE, 1976).

The first Soviet higher educational institution was founded in 1920 in Tashkent, which was called the University of Turkestan. The Uzbeks also changed their alphabet twice during the Soviet Union; in 1928 they changed the Arabic based alphabet into the Latin script, and in 1939 the Latin was changed into the Russian based script. The number of students in Soviet based schools and universities increased before WW II. In the 1939-40 academic year, there were 1,219,000 students in the educational establishments of Uzbekistan.

After WW II the number of higher educational institutions and the students in them increased dramatically. In 1976 there were 246,600 students in 42 higher

educational establishments in the country. Most of them were in the capital city Tashkent (Higher Education in Uzbekistan, 2003).

The education system of the independent Uzbekistan is as in the Soviet period. For example, there are still no private universities in the country and one cannot find any information about tuition and fees (Higher Education in Uzbekistan, 2003). The education system is still supported by the state government and at the same time the government forces students to participate in agricultural work during the academic year as in the Soviet period. For example, Bryon MacWilliams who recently visited Uzbekistan witnessed this situation. MacWilliams describes this situation in Uzbekistan in his article, "Where Cotton Comes Before College" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as, "There are no classes at Samarkand State University. Only two days ago Islam Karimov, the president of Uzbekistan, announced that state collective farm needed help if the cotton crop was to be harvested before the early winter rains. ... President Karimov is an authoritarian leader. ... He has also continued the Soviet practice of pressing students into service" (MacWilliams, 2003, p. A56).

Nevertheless, the number of students and universities is growing in the country. According to the report of the Ministry of Education of Uzbekistan, currently there are 190,000 students in 62 higher educational establishments. All the higher educational institutions are funded and controlled by the government (Imamov, Safarova, & Butaerov, 2002).

Despite the socialist oriented policy of the current Uzbek officials, Uzbekistan has no close relations with Russia as in case for both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. For example, the Russian language does not play any role officially in the country, while the Russian language is official in Kyrgyzstan and plays an important role in Kazakhstan. Moreover, both Kazakh and Kyrgyz alphabets are still Cyrillic based while the Uzbeks shifted their alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script in 1993 (NEB, 2002, p. 225).

The literacy rate of the three countries is also different. The differences are because of the local schools status for Russians. There were more religious schools in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. People who had Islamic schools education were considered to be illiterate by the Soviets. The data are taken from the Great Soviet Encyclopedia.

Table 3 shows how different literacy rates were in the countries before the Bolshevik Revolution and how they all equalized by 1970.

Table 3: Literacy Rate of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan since the Russian control began in the countries									
Year	Kyrgyzstan			Kazakhstan			Uzbekistan		
	M (%)	F (%)	Total (%)	M (%)	F (%)	Total (%)	M (%)	F (%)	Total (%)
1897	N/A	N/A	3.1	N/A	N/A	8.1%	N/A	N/A	2
1939	N/A	N/A	79.8	90.3	75.8	83.6%	83.6	73.3	78.7
1970	99.8	99.6	99.7	99.8	99.6	99.7	99.8	99.6	99.7
2004									

Source: Great Soviet Encyclopedia

### Section III

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is a detailed description, comparison and analysis of the research conducted on the higher education systems in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This summary produces the foundation for interpreting the perspectives of a sample of higher education officials and students from the three countries. Although this study covers the history of higher education of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the main emphasis of the research is about the post-Soviet period.

There are many articles and other sources used for the research but the main resources of this paper are the official reports and a relatively small number of comparative studies.

Since the three countries are independent, most of the studies and articles about higher education are not similar to each other; therefore, each country's literature is separately reviewed.

#### **Kyrgyzstan**

One of the most important resources for the study about the higher education system in Kyrgyz Republic is the *Final Report to the Ministry of Education and Culture [of the] Kyrgyz Republic* by Phipps and Wolanin (October, 2001). According to the report, the foundation of national identity in a transition society depends mostly on higher education. The Report identifies five main issues in the current Kyrgyz higher education system: (1) corruption; (2) insufficient connection to the labor market; (3) lack of responsiveness to student demand; (4) excess of higher education institutions; and (5) deterioration of academic quality (Phipps & Wolanin, 2001).

The report discusses the reforms in the higher education system. One of the crucial problems of the current situation is the low salary for the faculty members, which is varied from \$16 USD to \$40 USD per month. In order to improve the quality of education and solve corruption issues, the professors and the university should financially support administrators. Therefore, the minimum salary of average faculty member should be increased up to \$100 USD per month (Phipps & Wolanin, 2001).



Another source for this study was the research study done by Drummond & De Young (2003) “Perspectives and Problems in Education Reform in Kyrgyzstan: The Case of National Scholarship Testing”. In their study they highlighted the successes and shortcomings of the first in the history of education in Kyrgyzstan National Scholarship Test in 2002 and its challenges faced during its implementation. They evaluate this test as the most significant educational reform in Kyrgyzstan history. As the implications of their study Drummond & De Young discuss the prospects of education in Kyrgyzstan.

The history and current status of the country and its higher education system is mainly taken from encyclopedic and web-based chronological resources. Three books are used in the research: *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1976), *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (2002), and two issues of *Britannica Book of the Year* (1994, 2000).

### **Kazakhstan**

For this country main literature is the *Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education System Development* by Professor G. Zhakenov (2002). According to Zhakenov (2002), higher education reform of Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union is divided into four main phases: (1) from 1991 to 1994: formation of the legislation and normative base of higher education; (2) from 1995 to 1998: modernization of the higher education system, revision of its content; (3) from 1999 to 2000: decentralization of education sector management and finance system, expansion of academic freedom of educational institutions; and (4) from 2001 and the next years: strategic development of higher professional education system. Zhakenov also notices that the role of the higher education is very important for preparing students to be good citizens of the country.

Chronological and official data about Kazakhstan and its higher education system development are also taken from web-based resources and three encyclopedic books. The main web-based resources of Kazakh education and the country are the official website of the Kazakhstani President, where the overall history of the country is described.<sup>3</sup> Website EuroEducation.net describes the current higher education system of Kazakhstan.<sup>4</sup> Three main encyclopedic literatures that are used for the study are the same as for Kyrgyzstan: *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1976), *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (2002), and two issues of *Britannica Book of the Year* (1994, 2000).

## Uzbekistan

In terms of national reports about the higher education system reforms in Uzbekistan, UNESCO is one of the main sources for this study. The authors of the report are Imamov, Safarova, and Butaerov (2003). The Uzbek report addresses only future development rather than the results of the reforms during the last decade. For instance, the authors divide higher education system development into three phases and only the first phase is about the past and the other two are about future development. The first phase is from 1997 to 2001 that is focused on the formation of reform basics. The second phase is from 2001 to 2005 and covers the National Program of higher education for the labor market of Uzbekistan. The last phase, from 2005 and the next years, is addressed on further development economy and higher education. The report indicates that the higher education system of Uzbekistan is under the control of the national government. Meanwhile, the private section is not developed in the country; therefore, there is no information about private universities except one sentence that the Uzbek laws allow for the creating of private higher educational institutions (Imamov, Safarova, & Butaerov, 2002).

Similar to the materials for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, data about the history and current status of education in Uzbekistan are taken from the same resources: web-based descriptive material is from the EuroEducation.net<sup>5</sup> and three encyclopedias: *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1976), *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (2002), and two issues of *Britannica Book of the Year* (1994, 2000).

As for additional resources, there is an article *Where Cotton Comes Before College* by MacWilliams (2003). This article describes the current situation of higher education in Uzbekistan. MacWilliams criticizes Uzbek higher education because the Uzbek national government still pushes students to be involved in agricultural works during the academic year. The author of the article describes how the students of Samarkand State University were involved in cotton crop harvesting during the school time. This tradition comes from the Soviet times (MacWilliams, 2003).

## **Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

There are very limited comparative literatures about the higher education systems in the three countries. However, *A five country study of national policies to improve educational quality in Central Asia* by Chapman and Weidman (2002) is a very interesting comparative research for my study. Comparative study includes five countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, my project addresses only the three of the countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Although Chapman and Weidman's (2002) study focuses on the education system of five Central Asian countries in general, the authors provide important findings and comparative analysis of education systems of the respective countries.

There are both similar and different tendencies in developing higher education in the three countries. Thus, the issue of educational quality, creating new standards for admissions, and national test development are implemented in all three countries. Nevertheless, there are some different tendencies in development of higher learning schools in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Flexibility in the curriculum system of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have already developed to some degree. Meanwhile, the higher education system of Uzbekistan has not worked on this issue yet. As another example, the education system of Kyrgyzstan addresses parent participation, NGO participation, new methodology of education and training, and academic advisory and inspection services. Meanwhile, the Ministries of Education of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan do not address these issues yet.

Overall, the literatures used for my study are different from each other. The studies and other resources tell us that reforms in the higher education systems in the three Central Asian countries have different achievements and different plans for further development.

## **Section IV**

### **METHODS OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **Introduction**

This section describes the procedure used in collecting and analyzing data for each of the information gathering processes: description of higher education, interview, and on-line survey. Since these approaches are different from each other, I divided this section into main subsections, description of higher education, interview and the survey.

#### **Description**

I have five years of experience as a student in a Soviet based university. Moreover, since 1992 I have been teaching at one of the local universities in Kyrgyzstan. I started my career as an instructor at the same university where I graduated. From 1997-1999 I was in Masters program at Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, Pakistan and I acquired M.Ed. in Teacher Education. After graduation I was in the project for Faculty Development of Aga Khan Education Service. Thus, I enriched my knowledge about the current situation of faculty issues and government reforms in higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan.

Later I was promoted to the position of supervisor of the International Relations Office of Osh State University. This experience provided me with wider and deeper perspectives on the successes and failures of reconstruction and reforms in Kyrgyzstan universities. Also my experience working in Peace Corps/Kyrgyzstan as TEFL Coordinator helped me to develop my own view of reforms of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The last few months before coming to US, I was appointed as a chair of English and Oriental Languages department, Integration of International Education Faculty, Osh State University.

The above described experience in higher education system of Kyrgyzstan gives me confidence to say that I am familiar with the former Soviet and post-Soviet higher education systems and can advance some of the reasons of successes and failures of government reforms in higher education system of my country.

My experience in higher education institutions of Kyrgyzstan since 1984, as a student, instructor, director and chair, served a good observation of the higher education system of my country during the last decade. As for the higher education systems of

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, they both had the same structure during the Soviet Union, and the *Law on Education* was passed in 1992 in both countries and had similar principles. Thus, I have some understandings of higher education systems in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as well.

I have collected the data for the description of higher education in three countries from different sources as the official reports of the countries' Ministries of Education, UNESCO reports, previous research on higher education systems, and materials from the Internet. I gathered information mostly from the official web sites of the three countries and encyclopedic sources that are considered trustworthy data for the research.

### **Survey**

In order to identify the changes in higher education in the last decade and also to determine the current status of higher education in the three independent Central Asian countries, I designed a survey questionnaire and collected responses from citizens from each of the three countries.

The targeted population of the survey was graduate students, faculty members, exchange scholars, and administrators of higher education institutions. The biggest number of survey respondents is the alumni and fellows of the Edmund S. Muskie/Freedom Support Act Graduate Fellowship Program (This degree program is for any citizen of Kyrgyzstan under forty years of age that has an undergraduate degree or will obtain it by the end of the academic year when he/she submits his/her application. Winners will spend one or two years obtaining Masters degrees at various universities of the U.S); Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) (This program provides young faculty from Kyrgyzstan the opportunity to work on curriculum development with U.S. counterparts during the period of one academic year. Participants attend university courses and participate in seminars and workshops); and Regional Scholars Exchange Program (This program allows scholars from both Kyrgyzstan and America to spend an academic semester conducting independent research in universities of either country).

All three programs are supported and financed by the U.S. State Department and all of them deal with reforms in higher education systems. I, myself, am a current participant in the Muskie/FSA Graduate Fellowship Program (2002-2004) and through my participation in the program I have become acquainted with other individuals from

Kyrgyzstan as well as individuals from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As a graduate student in the Educational Policy, Research and Administration Department of UMass/Amherst, I also have learned about other individuals from the three countries who have participated in various educational opportunities here at UMass/Amherst. There is an estimated 20 individuals who were identified participants for this research study. I have obtained their e-mail addresses from lists distributed to participants in the above programs. For those names for which e-mail addresses were not on a prepared list, I used Internet search techniques to find an e-mail address for those individuals. In a few cases, I have used “snowball” sampling techniques in that some individuals have given to me the names and e-mail addresses of individuals with whom they knew.

The primary criterion in identifying potential subjects for this research was that they are knowledgeable about educational reforms in their countries, and that they have had some exposure to worldwide reforms in higher education. Since it would be inappropriate to ask individuals to comment on the challenges of educational reform in neighboring countries, my survey focused on their opinions about only their country of origin.

### **Interview**

Interview was another tool to collect data from the respondents. Thus, I called the participants after they completed and returned the survey. Interviews provided me with deeper understanding of the issues of higher education systems in the three respective countries.

### **Sampling Design**

The on-line survey *Higher Education Reform in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union* was administered in 2004 Spring Semester through e-mails. Appendix A contains a copy of the survey.

Although the primary estimated e-mail addresses of the survey participants were more than 20, I was able to get the responses from 15 participants. Thus the sample population was from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistani citizens.

The highest response rate from the Kyrgyz respondents. The lowest response rate is from the Kazakh respondents. 4 of the respondents completed the surveys.

The high rate of responses from Kyrgyzstan has two main reasons: (1) I am originally from Kyrgyzstan and the respondents might identify my Kyrgyz name and replied to my questions willingly; and (2) most of the Kyrgyz respondents were my former colleagues from Osh State University, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, Arabaev University, Batken University and Peace Corps/Kyrgyzstan. Most of them I knew personally; this was another main factor explaining the high rate from the respondents from Kyrgyzstan.

There are two main reasons for the lower rate from the Kazakh and Uzbek respondents: (1) the time of providing survey was not good for the respondents because many of the respondents are graduate students in the United States universities and had their final examinations at that time; (2) about 90 percent of the respondents do not know me personally.

### **Data Collection**

The responses were received during February, March and April 2004. The first time the surveys were sent in February. This was followed up later in order to get deeper understanding and clarifying responses. The survey message consisted of two attachments; the Consent Form and Survey Questionnaire. If he or she did not agree with answering to the survey questions, they simply did not reply (see Appendix A).

### **Description of Measure and Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument was designed to identify reforms in higher education in the last decade and the current status of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Although the survey is not divided into the sections, it consists of the three different types of questions: (1) demographic questions, (2) open-ended questions, and (3) rating questions.

The demographic questions include: citizenship of the respondents, experience in higher education institutions, current social status (e.g. job, position), age, and gender. I put one demographic question in the first page but the rest of them in the last page because to put all the five demographic questions in the first page might be less attractive for the respondents, therefore, the more important questions are in the first two pages.

The second type of questions was open-ended questions that asked the respondents to describe and give comments on certain questions. There were four questions that required some comment or descriptions. The first open-ended question was about the presidential education programs' contributions to higher education reforms in the three countries. The next two open-ended questions were related to the improvement and decline of higher education systems after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The last question was for additional comments and thoughts about reforms in higher education.

The next Section V contains two parts: Capacity of higher education institutions and National Scholarship Tests. There will be discussion and analysis of the admission process in the three countries of study. The capacity of higher education will be analyzed in three phases: in 1970s; 1991-1992, the first year of independence of all three countries; and 2000. In the second part "National Scholarship Tests" there will be a critical analysis of the enrollment process in the HEIs of the three countries of study.



## **Section V**

### **Admissions to Higher Education Institutions in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

#### **Capacity of Higher Education in three Central Asian countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

##### **Introduction**

Like other Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union, the three countries of Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are struggling to develop a civil and free-market economy in their respective societies. The governments of these countries see formal education as the essential part of the struggle to solve social and economic problems of their countries. They all are facing challenges, such as serious shortage of human and material resources, lack of sufficient infrastructure, ineffective and corrupt government (Student Association of Stockholm School of Economics).

As parts of the Soviet Union, the republics of Central Asia benefited from the organized and highly scientific system of centralized education that the communist regime established. The people of three Central Asian republics: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were comparatively well-educated. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought all three of these countries a number of problems. At present, education on all levels needs to be modified to meet the new demands of market economy.

Compared with other spheres of social life, higher education remained a priority in all three countries. Thus, Presidents of all three countries, Akaev of Kyrgyzstan, Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and Karimov of Uzbekistan, have personally paid great attention to the problems of higher education from the first days of the independence of their respective countries. All three presidents saw the solution of the problem of higher education in implementing presidential programs, adaptation of western system of admission process and allowing the establishment of private higher education institutions (HEIs). Their expectations were that private educational institutions would

offer educational programs not found in state universities which ultimately would contribute to the overall development of these countries (Student Association of Stockholm School of Economics).

### **Kyrgyzstan**

In 1993 in Kyrgyzstan the law on education was declared. It allowed the expansion of HEIs in the country. Today there are 39 HEIs and of which 15 are private. The number of students of HEIs of Kyrgyzstan has increased three times since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It seems that government of Kyrgyzstan makes efforts to support HEIs in order to solve the problems with the current high rate of unemployed young people in the country. One of the justifications of the country government to establish new HEIs is that unemployed young people would attend classes and acquire higher education, rather than being unemployed and contribute to the already unstable political and economic climate in the country. However, it becomes more and more difficult for the indigenous people to get university degrees due to the growing tuition and fees. Therefore, the overall financial situation forces not only private but state universities to collect fees from the students. At present 87% of all Kyrgyz students pay tuition (Research and Higher Education in Central Asia. General Information: Kyrgyzstan).

Regarding the problems of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, Wolanin (2002) argues, that the quality of state and private HEIs of Kyrgyzstan differs from each other. Thus, it has been observed the following shortcomings of higher education system in Kyrgyzstan, such as: the low prestige of the degree, the low quality in terms of faculty and curriculum, lack of teaching and learning facilities, unclaimed specialties and corruption on all levels of education. Ultimately, all these factors developed low requirements for admission to some state universities in order to get sufficient entrants to their HEIs. Due to the low quality of offered services according to the results of Accreditation of Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan a number of institutions have already been forced to close.

## **Kazakhstan**

The data collected from the Kazakhstan National Reports on Higher Education, research studies, survey and interview shows that higher educational system of Kazakhstan is undergoing significant changes. There are 47 state-owned and 117 non-state HEIs in the country and the number of private HEIs is growing. For the last decade the focus of specialties has been changed too. More students are being trained in economics, law, management and international relations. The changes in demands of particular specialties seem to contribute to the elimination of many specialties (Library of Congress Country Studies, 1996).

Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is known as the most Russified nation during the Soviet period, due to its large Russian population. In 1960's most of the Kazakh medium schools were closed, and today 70% of ethnic Kazakhs know the indigenous language. The number of Kazakh medium institutions is increasing, however, Kazakh academic language still remains to be developed, and therefore the Russian language is still the dominating language at HEIs in Kazakhstan (Research and Higher Education in Central Asia. General Information: Kazakhstan).

Some of the newly established private HEIs have already developed good reputations. Examples include the TURAN University, Higher Law School ADILET and KIMEP, a higher institution of management. KIMEP seems to be the dominating institution for higher economic studies in the country. This HEI has expanded since its establishment and at present it offers M.BA and M.PA-programs and also Ph.D. studies abroad (Student Association of Stockholm School of Economics).

## **Uzbekistan**

The data from Higher Education in Uzbekistan (2003) shows that Uzbek government is making attempts to implement reform programs for the development of the higher education system in the country, such as the National Program for Personnel Training (NPPT), adopted in 1997. The guide lines stress revision of the curriculum and preparation of new text-books in Latin script, modernization of teaching methods, and maintaining a high level of access and fairness in the education system. The government expenditure for education in Uzbekistan, compared to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, is

relatively large. The data from the National Report and the respondents from Uzbekistan suggest that the already high expenditure is increasing further. However, the data also indicates that there is a lack of up-dated teaching and learning facilities, support materials and teacher-training programs in Uzbekistan.

There are no non-state (private) HEIs in Uzbekistan, though the government program “Education Act” adopted in 1997 allows for the establishment of private institutions (Abdurakhmanova, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

The process of reforming the higher education system in all three countries, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan seems to be a complicated and painful transition and it is still facing a number of problems. It seems there are similarities in the relationship correlation between the intentions of government officials and what is actually being implemented, and the way higher education systems of these three countries is responding to the demands of new labor market. However, there is a lack of modern equipment, facilities, materials, low salaries and lack of incentives in state HEIs. All the above problems seem to contribute to the creation and increasing corruption in the education system at all levels.

## Education and Patterns of Change in Higher Education

Table 2 gives you a notion about the numbers and types of higher educational institutions and the number of the students during the last 30 years.

<b>Table 2: Higher Education of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan by numbers</b>							
<b>Year</b>	<b>Type of institutions</b>	<b>Kazakhstan</b>		<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>		<b>Uzbekistan</b>	
		Number of HEIs	Number of students	Number of HEIs	Number of students	Number of HEIs	Number of students
<b>1970s</b>	Public	44	200,500	9	49,000	42	146,600
	Private	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>200,500</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>49,000</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>146,600</b>
<b>1991-92</b>	Public	61	288,000	12	58,000	52	321,700
	Private	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>288,000</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>58,000</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>321,700</b>
<b>2000</b>	Public	47	440,382	36	192,000	62	190,000
	Private	117	126,900	15	15,500	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>569,306</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>207,500</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>190,000</b>

Source: GSE (Great Soviet Encyclopedia), 1994 Britannica Book of Year, and the reports of Ministries of Education of the countries to UNESCO.

As you see from the Table 2, the numbers of higher education institutions and students have dramatically increased in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan during the last decade. While in Uzbekistan the number public universities and colleges increased, the number of students has decreased from 321,700 in 1992 to 190,000 in 2000. The data of my study shows that enrollment declined due to the following reasons. 1. An entrance examination based on written tests was used for the first time in the history of higher education in Uzbekistan. This factor does not allow students with low scores to get admission. 2. Another factors which influenced not only Uzbekistan, but also the neighboring countries, as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, is the emigration of other ethnic minorities. 3. The economy's demand for college graduate fell, as the prestige is low, because the graduates can hardly be employed in government enterprises. 4. The number of enrolled students in HEIs in two other countries: Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

can not be actual. Thus, in these two countries the same student can be enrolled in several HEIs, as it is allowed by the higher education regulations of these countries, whereas in Uzbekistan one student can be enrolled only in one HEI. 5. There was a big tendency to go back to the national identity and the rules of marriages of young girls. Parents preferred to marry their daughters rather than their daughters spend 4-5 years in higher education, and more than that it is hard for the educated girls to get married compared to the girls who are younger, and do not acquire high education. 6. The tuition and fees for the education in HEIs in Uzbekistan is much higher according to the living level, whereas it is cheaper for students of Uzbekistan to get high education in neighboring countries in Central Asia. Thus, from my own observation, there are many students from Uzbekistan in the universities of the south of Kyrgyzstan. Also, after the conflict clash between uzbek and kyrgyz ethnic groups in Osh, Kyrgyzstan in 1990, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Universities were open in Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of the country. These universities seem to enroll the citizens of Uzbekistan and even employ the faculty of uzbek ethnicity, living in Kyrgyzstan.

The proportion of students to the population has also changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The current leading country by the number of higher education students per 10,000 people is Kyrgyzstan. It has 410 per 10,000 citizens, whereas there are 298 in Kazakhstan and 115 in Uzbekistan. The rapid increase of universities and colleges in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is based on the free market system in the countries, the opening of the private institutions, and the decentralization policy of education system (Research and Higher Education in Central Asia. General Information: Kyrgyzstan).

However, results are different in education system of Uzbekistan. There are no non-state universities in Uzbekistan. However, the government education program “Education Act” was adopted in 1997 and provides a legal basis to establish private institutions. Whereas, in Kazakhstan out 164 of total HEIs: 117 private and 47 public; in Kyrgyzstan (Phipps & Wolanin, 2001) out of 51 total: 15 private, and 36 public; and in Uzbekistan out of 62 total: all 62 HEIs are public. This data shows that the government’s control over the higher education policy seems to be stronger in Uzbekistan compare to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

## **National Scholarship Testing**

### **Kyrgyzstan**

In January 2002, a newly appointed and reform-minded Minister of Education, Camilla Sharshekeeva, presented an ambitious program for education change. According to the opinion of western educators and researchers, Sharshekeeva was a long-term proponent of western-style education reforms, as she was the founder of the American University in Kyrgyzstan (now it has changed its name to American University of Central Asia). She was suggesting reforms in all the sectors of education development. Thus, she suggested reforms in governance of higher and secondary education; to make investment in teacher-training at all levels; she also "...declared war on corruption and proposed the introduction of a board of trustees to oversee the higher education system" (Drummond & De Young, 2003, p. 2).

The priority of Sharshekeeva was to establish an Independent Testing Organization (ITO), modeled on the Educational Testing Service of USA, that would be also be independent of day-to-day government control. According to her assumptions and expectations ITO would promote transparency in university admissions and ultimately overcome one of the main obstacles of education development – corruption, in this sphere. In order to achieve her new goals as Minister of Education, Sharshekeeva addressed to US Government for support.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) agreed to assist Kyrgyzstan with the creation of the suggested ITO. The American Council for International Education (ACCELS) on a subcontract from CARANA Corporation, took the initiative to develop and implement the project (Drummond & De Young, 2003).

### **University Testing**

The idea of standardized testing was not new in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Most HEIs have already been using some sort of standardized testing in their admission process since 1991. This testing was used to replace oral examinations based on the subject matter. These traditional testing forms inherited from the Soviet tradition required techniques of memorization of facts, reciting of texts and retelling by heart the written essays, translations, dictations and rules related

to the subject matter rather than critical thinking skills from the entrants. Traditionally, the best students were those who had the strong capacity to memorize set and formulated rules in the subject matter.

In Kyrgyzstan today, many teachers started to understand the main benefit of written testing as the introduction of a more scientific process of learning. However, what is assessed in most cases is still recalling the information and rules. The significance of problem solving skills, and the application of the acquired knowledge still remains to be understood and accepted in practice by secondary schools and HEIs policies and regulations. Therefore, there is a notion among the faculty of Kyrgyzstan HEIs that any teacher can create standardized test in format that can be valid and reliable. However, there are no local specialists who have special training and skills in developing standardized tests.

Drummond & De Young (2003) point out that another important issue of testing in Kyrgyzstan, is the inadequacy to assess application of knowledge. They further indicate that secondary education of Kyrgyzstan does not provide enough opportunities to develop students' problem solving skills that are needed for participants in industrial and information-based economy. They state that students are encouraged to buy the questions, complete with the answers and memorize them prior to the test time. They give example of the rector of the national medical school, who claimed in 2002 that any student who can memorize all 1000 possible questions for the medical exam is more than welcome. The education officials still seem to have the belief that students' memorization abilities provides a greater chance to be successful in future (Drummond & De Young, 2003).

Drummond & De Young (2003) also indicate that standardized testing discussion has already been launched in other CIS countries, e.g. Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The difference of Kyrgyzstan Testing was to link test results to actual university allocation. The National Scholarship Testing made attempt to both assess students abilities related to knowledge application and to use achieved scores as the basis for allocating government funded education opportunities for high achieving school students.



### **Testing as Catalyst for Further Education Reforms**

Teacher training, standards, curriculum development and assessment are the critical components of an education system. While the Minister prioritized the development of the testing initiative, it was formally understood that education reform could only be successful if it affected the entire system. It is significant to notice that the Kyrgyz testing efforts begun by Sharshkeeva were initiated from her experiences gained in a US university.

In Kyrgyzstan higher education is still highly valued, and changing the criteria for entrance upsets the existing balance of power in the education system. The literature suggests that this was exactly the intention of Sharshkeeva, "...return the control of university entrance to the merit of students and their parents, who will pressure the university and secondary schools to alter their teaching and testing procedure" (Drummond & De Young, 2003, p. 5).

The test in 2002 was voluntary and did not replace the traditional school final exams. Traditional rote-memorization school exams in 2002 were conducted among the secondary school, as well as the National Scholarship Test for those students who wanted to attend the universities. It is important to comment that the materials for the National Scholarship Test was taken from the required 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> form curriculum, rather than from curricular covered in elite and private schools of the country.

The task of the National Scholarship Test committee was to analyze test results in order to distribute scholarships to 5,085 students. This committee was composed of representatives from NGOs, the government, the international community, the university community, and the parliament (The National Scholarship Test of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003).

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2002 13,807 high school graduates from across the Kyrgyz Republic participated in the first annual National Scholarship Test. The test was free of charge and all the entrants were eligible to apply to any state university to take it. The test consisted of three sections: mathematical reasoning, verbal, and essay composition. The data indicates that the National Scholarship Test successfully distinguished between the strongest and weakest entrants. There were regional differences in the results, with urban entrants showed higher scores than rural entrants. It is said that it was not surprisingly that the highest scores were in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, and the

lowest were in the rural Batken oblast (the remote mountainous region). Also, the entrants scores were significantly higher for Russian language than Kyrgyz or Uzbek. This was true for the urban examinees who attend primarily Russian language schools. For example, in Bishkek there are 31 Russian Language schools as opposed to 11 Kyrgyz Language schools, even though the number of Kyrgyz ethnic and Russian ethnic groups are equal in this area. The results seem to be due to the fact that these Russian Language schools are mostly situated in urban areas of the country, and offer much higher quality education. More than that, socio-economic backgrounds of the community in those areas, educational background of parents, availability and access of learning resources are in more advanced situation compare to the rural setting entrants (American Councils Projects for USAID; The National Scholarship Test of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003: A First Look; Research in Higher Education with Central Asia)

### **Successes and Issues of the 2002 Testing Initiative**

The reports of the results of the National Test in Kyrgyzstan indicate that one of the successes of the testing initiatives of 2002 was collecting data on students from different regions, school types, genders, and language groups. The test provided some of the most current data available in the Kyrgyz Republic. It was expected that the data and the ability to make conclusions with every year testing on such a mass scale be conducted. The analysis of data and further testing cycles would surely influence educational policy-making and planning. Another impact of the 2002 testing is that Kyrgyzstan educators are encouraged to learn new methodologies as they prepare their students for success on the next year's scholarship test. The ultimate expectations from the results of the 2002 test was that assessment methods become institutionalized, which challenges teacher training and provides for curricular reforms that will follow. The report shows that USAID, American Council and local stakeholders are currently developing a business plan that will allow the ITO to become financially sustainable (The National Scholarship Test of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003: A First Look).

Another impact is that the leading educators who participated in testing process now have opportunities for professional development through contact with leading world-class specialists in pedagogical achievement testing. They are now in contact with the educators of leading universities who can advise and consult on continued testing efforts.

The most shocking events happened two weeks prior to the test. Minister of Education of Kyrgyzstan, Sharshakeeva was removed from her position. However, the reports show that testing process went well. However, the actual scholarship assignment was not as transparent to the public as it was planned. The data also indicates that the final decisions were made behind the closed doors of the officials of universities, which seems to contribute to the already existing mistrust of parents and communities about the national testing (Drummond & De Young, 2003).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The data and respondents from Kyrgyzstan indicate that despite the successes in the implementation of the National Scholarship Test in 2002, there are serious obstacles to further testing reform in long term in Kyrgyzstan. Although, it seems that the number of trained local educators is growing and they wish to contribute to reforms, their initiatives seem not to be supported by Western specialists who often do not speak any national languages. Another point is the officials who are considered as the elite of the educational community do not consider their ideas feasible and worth to be accepted. The data shows that there is a big influence of ideas from Russian educational community and they seem to contribute to the reforms of Kyrgyzstan education along with USAID, American Council and some other educational projects.

Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan seems to be resistant to change and pay little attention to initiatives. The educational officials tend to think that there is nothing new in those initiatives and nothing new to learn from West. It seems that the impact of “cold war” on the minds of the Soviet-time generation still remains status quo. Thus, new innovators, like the former Minister of Education Sharshakeeva, still seem to be perceived as outsiders.

## **Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education System Development states that the reforms of Kazakhstan higher education sector implemented during the independence can be divided into the following phases:

*The 1<sup>st</sup> phase (1991-1994): Formation of the legislation and normative base of higher education.*

The primary goal of that period was to establish a network of HEIs and revision of higher education specialties directed at provision of independence in production of specialists, satisfaction of market economy, oblasts and regions needs. The Law on education adopted by the government in 1993 secured measures implemented during that period. In 1994 the State Standard of Higher Education of Kazakhstan was introduced. The document established introduction of multilevel higher education structure of the country, academic degrees and masters.

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (1995-1998): Modernization of the higher education system, revision of its content.*

This phase can be characterized by conceptual identification of the higher education system development that was reflected in the Concept of State Education Policy approved by the national Council for State Policy under the President of Kazakhstan on August 4, 1995. During this stage new normative acts regulating activity of HEIs were adopted. In 1995-1997 first Kazakhstan education standards for 310 specialties of higher professional education were adopted. In 1996 new formulation of Classifier of higher education specialties composed of 342 specialties was approved. Private education sector emerged and began to develop.

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase (1999-2000): Decentralization of education sector management and finance system, expansion of academic freedoms of education institutions.*

During this stage a decentralization of the education institutions management system was implemented. Principles of admission to HEIS were revised and transferred to production of specialties with professional education based on state education projection.

In 1999 a new model of HEIs student enrolment formation was introduced. The model provided allocation of state education grants and loans to entrants on competitive basis.

*The 4<sup>th</sup> Phase (2001-next years): Strategic development of higher professional education system.*

Basic directions of higher professional education of 21<sup>st</sup> century have been identified. It means that the initial stage of education sector reform completed and that allowed to set up strategic objectives and main directions for further reform and development of higher education, design a new national model. Higher education development tended to refusal from state monopoly on education, removal of rigid centralized management and strict regulation of HEIs activity that resulted in appearance of private education sector indicating creation of education services market.

(Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education System Development).

### **Admission Process**

In accordance with instructions of President Nazarbaev regarding necessity to introduce new principles of admission to HEIs, the New Model of Public HEIs Enrollment Formation was designed and approved by Governmental Resolution in 1999. The model enabled to provide objectivity of entrants' knowledge evaluation, select gifted entrants, stop patronage and exclude many negative things typical for admission campaign in Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education System Development)

The new model provided for evaluation of all admission exam results by an independent body and a competition for each academic specialty. The National Center of State Education Standards under the Ministry of Education was established according to the Governmental Resolution in December 1999 to ensure implementation of the model. The main goal of the new model introduction was to provide entrants with the right to select academic specialty and HEIs as well. Establishment of regional commissions enabled to do that at oblasts entrants' residence.

Another important point interrelated to the issues of student enrollment in Kazakhstan is the issue of high quality training. Kazakhstan National Report of Higher Education System suggests that provision of high quality training is interconnected with

principles of student enrollment formation. That is why, it is stated in this government document the obligatory testing of all HEIs entrants into the rules of Admission to HEIs irrespective their ownership form. For this purpose the National Center for the State Education Standard and Testing was established to implement this activity (Ayupova & De Young). The data from the respondents and also the research indicate that the new principles of admission are widely approved by entrants and their parents. Thus, in 1999 43, 649 entrants (23%) of all general secondary graduates filed their applications for participation in the complex testing. In 2000 this number grew to 100,219 (50%), in 2001 there were 142,623 (68%) young people were going to pass the testing procedure (Kazakhstan National Report on Higher Education System Development)

### **Uzbekistan**

In 1997 the Uzbek government has introduced a reform program to reinforce the human resources in the country. The National Program for Personnel Training (NPPT) outlined the education reform objectives. It was adopted by the Uzbek parliament. The NPPT is a strategy providing a framework for the fundamental task of building a new education and training system. As the document indicates the important objectives are revision of the curriculum and preparation of new textbooks in Latin script, modernization of teaching methods, and maintaining the high levels of access and fairness in the education system (Research and Higher Education in Central Asia. General Information: Uzbekistan).

Government of Uzbekistan expends a significant proportion on education. It may increase even further as Uzbekistan government implements its education reform program. Uzbekistan continues to place a high priority on education although there has been some fluctuation in state budget allocation to education (11% in 1993 and 17% in 1995). However, the increase in current expenditures for salaries, food and student and teachers subsidies has led to capital budget declines and deterioration in facilities. There is also a lack of financial resources to upgrade facilities, replace outdated or unusable equipment, provide learning support materials, and maintain teacher-training programs (Student Association Stockholm. School of Economics. Central Asia- an Introduction).

The transition from one economic system to another has also influenced on the education system in positive way. In Uzbekistan, the privatization of schools is allowed

under the 1997 Education Law. More emphasis is being placed upon on economic, business management and other market-related subjects. Business schools have proliferated, and donors are expressing interest in providing assistance.

### **Admission to HEIs of Uzbekistan**

The admission of the students to HEIs in Uzbekistan is carried out on the basis of state grants and contracts. Sharpe (2003) provides the results of the interview with the Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan Saidakhror Guliam. The latter states that annually the Cabinet of Ministers issues a Resolution providing detailed information and requirements on enrollment to HEIs of Uzbekistan. There is a Republican Testing Center under the Cabinet of Ministers, which is responsible for the organization of testing and development of testing materials. Uzbekistan uses a modern testing system based on multiple choice.

The testing is held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August throughout the country for all types of Uzbekistan HEIs. The report says that the testing system has been improved during the last eight years. The National Report on Higher Education indicates the availability of a database of qualified tests, which require from the applicants a deep knowledge and understanding of subjects. The approbation of the tests by pupils and teachers are published in the national newspaper “Ahborotma” –Vestnik every year by the Republican Testing Center. In case a student does not get a state grant, the fees are paid by parents, by companies or organizations. In July 2001 according to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan a new system on provision of educational credits and loans was introduced, which gave the opportunity for many students to be enrolled in HEIs throughout the republic

The National Reports on the implementation of reforms in higher education of Uzbekistan indicate that the prestige of higher education in Uzbekistan constantly increases. Thus, in 2000/2001 academic year 49,500 students entered HEIs to Bachelor degree course, and 3,600 to Master’s course (Research and Higher Education in Central Asia. General Information: Uzbekistan). However, one of the respondents from Uzbekistan argues that that the nationwide entrance test “...has very positive meaning...at the same time the quality of these tests is another issue. In many cases it’s not clear indicator of student’s knowledge. Because many students just try to memorize

prepared answers on these test questions.” However, the respondents of my survey and interview have indicated a controversial data. One of my respondents argues that:

National Scholarship program was a total failure....in case of Independent Testing Organization, professors and teachers hate it, because they lost some source of income in a sense of corrupting the entrance exams. However, the corruption inside the Independent Testing Organization committee and ineffectiveness of the testing processes have resulted in actually low levels of knowledge among enrolled students.

### **Future of the Higher Education Systems**

Because of the transition period in all three countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, there are some debates about the new models of higher education systems in the three countries. Some respondents think westernization of the system is the best idea; some educators seem to prefer the sustainability of the Soviet model, as the best idea, and others are advocates of the creation of the new and unique system for the countries.

In order to determine the respondents' thoughts about this issue, I put a question, *If you were able to change the current higher education system in your country which of the following systems: Western European, United States, Soviet Union based, current Russian, none of them but unique for the country, would you use as a primary model system?*

The overall answers to the question suggest that nearly half of the respondents think the system should be unique to each country. Meanwhile, fewer respondents think the United States' higher education model would be the best for the countries, and a few respondents would change the system to the western European model.

The results of the question, however, vary depending on country. For example, Kazakh and Uzbek respondents prefer the U.S. model. Meanwhile, Kyrgyz respondents seem not to be in favor of the United States model. However, the western European model of higher education is the most attractive to the Kyrgyz respondents, while, very few Kazakh and Uzbek respondents indicated it.

The questions about the quality of the education during the Soviet Union and after gaining independence favor the Soviet period: more than half of the respondents think that the quality of education was better during the Soviet Union than the present time.



The respondents think that the quality of education became worse after the collapse of the Soviet Union and nobody thinks that the quality of education became better than before the gaining independence.

Respondents are optimistic about the future of the higher education: some respondents think that the higher education system will be changed for the better. However, more than half of the respondents cannot say anything or think that the future of the higher education is not promising.

### **Open-ended Questions**

There were four open-ended questions in the survey where the respondents had opportunities to add comments about the reforms in higher education systems in the countries.

First open-ended question: whether there are other programs that contribute to the reforms of higher education. The respondents from Kyrgyzstan noticed the following programs: (1) Civic Education Project (CEP); (2) French Alliance Education Programs; (3) Turkish Education Programs; (4) British Council Programs; (5) German Fellowship Program DAAD; and (6) European Union Programs, TEMPUS and TACIS.

The respondents Kazakhstan mentioned only two programs: Admission Test Program and “Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

The respondents from Uzbekistan mention five educational programs in the country: (1) Eurasia Foundation Programs; Funds (2) “Ustoz”; (3) “Ulugbek”; (4) “Bobur”, and (5) “Forobiy.”

Second and third open-ended questions are about improving and worsening points of higher education since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since the comments are very rich and different from each other, I divided the comments into three different sections.

#### *Comments from the respondents from Kyrgyzstan*

**a) Improvement in higher education since 1991:** (1) established more links with the other countries' universities; (2) more exchange programs with western countries; (3) information technology has developed; (4) higher education system and universities

have gained more independence; (5) less ideological but more open to different ideas; (6) freedom of choice; (7) the number of institutions has increased; (8) professional network has established among scholars, therefore, scholars have more opportunities to travel to the other countries for research; (9) private section of education system has developed; (10) curriculum has become more flexible; (11) NGOs emerged; (12) American University in Central Asia has established; and (13) Communist based ideology has been removed from the higher education.

**b) Worsening of higher education since 1991:** (1) technical and material base worsened; (2) value of education has become different; (3) academic honesty worsened; (4) highly qualified Russian and Russian-speaking specialists have left the country; (5) centralized system has weakened its power; (6) corruption increased; (7) favoritism, nepotism, and tribalism issues emerged; (8) quality of education has worsened; (9) funding and financing mechanism have worsened; (10) uncritical in adopting the ideas from abroad; (11) salaries of educators decreased; (12) the system has lost its ideological trends; (13) worsened the links with the provincial pre-college teachers who used to be trained in universities; (14) no stimulus for educators; (15) research works have decreased; (16) many universities do not meet the standards of higher education; (17) misbalance between the education systems (e.g. pre-school, elementary, secondary, and higher education); (18) less accountability; (19) no free education that created the unequal access to the higher education; and (20) universities have become more commercial rather than educational institutions.

Overall, according to the responses the Kyrgyz higher education seems to have more problems than achievements.

*Comments from the respondents from Kazakhstan*

**a) Improvement in higher education since 1991:** (1) higher education has become more responsive to the market needs; (2) more flexibility in the system; (3) competitiveness in the systems; (4) Universal [National standard] Testing Admission Program has established; (5) new Financial Aid System has founded; (6) financial system has become more transparent and fair; (7) private institutions have opened; (8) more choices in

education institutions; and (9) exchange programs for students and professors have established.

**b) Worsening of higher education since 1991:** (1) quality of education has worsened; (2) lack of research resources and facilities; (3) competition for fee paying students drove down the admission and academic criteria; (4) “Money talks” proverb plays an important role in higher education; (5) many qualified faculty members have left the country; (6) unequal access to the higher education; (7) financial mechanism has become unstable; and (8) corruption has increased.

Higher education system of Kazakhstan has also more unsolved problems than the achievements since the country got its independence.

### *Comments from the respondents from Uzbekistan*

**a) Improvement in higher education since 1991:** (1) established more exchange programs; (2) information technology has developed; (3) new disciplines have been introduced; (4) admissions system has improved; (5) introduction of tuition and fees; (6) centralized non-governmental testing agencies have established; (9) more access to the other countries’ universities and colleges; (10) new University of World Economy and Diplomacy has opened; and (11) more freedom and open discussions during the classes.

**b) Worsening of higher education since 1991:** (1) highly qualified specialists have left the country; (2) lack of control in all aspects of the system; (3) quality of education has worsened; (4) no motivation for teaching; (5) absence of set standards for educational institutions; (6) many people cannot afford to study abroad; (7) very limited choice of departments and schools; (8) CIS (former Soviet countries) countries’ higher education degrees are not valid in Uzbekistan; (9) poor investment to higher education; (10) corruption increased; (11) unstable social security; (12) number of disciplines have decreased; (13) poor access to information; (14) lack of teaching and learning materials for Uzbek-speaking groups; and (15) unequal access to higher education.

The higher education system of Uzbekistan seems also to have many problems to be solved.

### **Summary of the respondents' comments of three Central Asian countries**

In 1991 the three countries of my study have gained freedom to develop. Different higher education institutions have been opened since then. Both students and the faculty members have more access to the western higher education institutions to study or to do research.

Poor quality of education and corruption are the main negative factors to improve the higher education system in the three countries.

### **Fourth open-ended question: additional comments of the respondents on higher education reform**

Each country's respondents have different comments on this question; therefore, I summarize the comments of each country separately.

#### *Comments from the respondents from Kyrgyzstan*

One of the Kyrgyz respondents thinks that there will be no change in higher education development until the administration changes its strategy for improving the quality of education. Minister of Education plays one of the most important roles in educational changes in Kyrgyzstan. The respondent criticizes the former Minister of Education of Kyrgyzstan (in April 2004 the new Minister of education has been appointed). The former minister could not distinguish the US and western European higher education systems but wanted to shift the Kyrgyz higher education system to the western European model.

Another respondent notices that the Kyrgyz Republic needs a new law for education system. The respondent argues that there is no connection between the demand for higher education and supply of higher education in current Kyrgyzstan. On the contrary, another respondent thinks that despite the low demand for higher education in the country, Kyrgyz graduates may continue their education in other countries or may find highly paid jobs there.

The most effective model for the Kyrgyz higher education system would be combined model of the western European, American, and the Soviet-type systems, thinks another respondent. European and Soviet types can provide accessibility for a greater number of students, whereas flexibility of the American model would allow students to tailor their education to their interests.

Other important comments: (1) more research; (2) increase the academic requirements for the students; (3) more flexibility in curriculum; (4) improve ethics and moral education; (5) reform in higher education should be provided along with the reforms of the other aspects of the society; and (6) salaries of the faculty members should be increased.

#### *Comments from the respondents from Kazakhstan*

Corruption is the most important negative factor of the reform in Kazakhstan, one of the Kazakh respondents comments. The respondent thinks that more using of the hi-tech in higher education system would save money and time. Another respondent notices that the national government plays an important role in implementing reforms in higher education.

Bureaucracy in current higher education that is the legacy of the Soviet Union still exists in Kazakh higher education, says another respondent. He thinks that the corruption is another important factor for the reform in the country's higher education. Hao Tran seems to support this argument,

The restructuring of Kazakhstan higher education has been aimed at enabling it to respond effectively to the new market-oriented economy. However, tradition and resistance to change have been major stumbling blocks. Those currently in charge of Kazakhstan transition are the product of decades of entrenched Soviet principles. In the hands of the old guard, the country comprehensive transformation is unlikely. Although Kazakhstan has changed much since independence, the goals of restructuring have not yet been reached. The future of Kazakhstan higher education, and indeed the health of the country itself, lies with the restless young generation of today. They will lead the country without being bogged down by the vestiges of the Soviet era (2000, p. 3)

Kazakhstan has a great potential in education but the implementations depend on learning western models of the higher education systems states another respondent.

#### *Comments from the respondents from Uzbekistan*

Main points of Uzbek respondents' comments are (1) policy makers should understand the vital importance of higher education to the nation; (2) motivation and

incentives of faculty are an important factor for improving the situation of the system; and (3) university administrators should know how to deal with fundraising.

Other ideas and comments are related to westernization of the higher education system of Uzbekistan. For instance, one respondent thinks that the positive features of the U.S. system should be introduced to the Uzbek system. Particularly, academic freedom and broader accesses to the Internet resources.

Increasing the exchange programs for both students and faculty would also improve the higher education reform in the country, thinks another respondent.

The following comments are related to improvement of the economic situation at the universities: (1) increasing salaries for the faculty; (2) increasing stipends of students; and (3) encouraging development of private higher education institutions.

### **Summary of the comments**

In summing up the comments of the three countries, I decided the following points as the major issues in current higher education systems of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: (1) corruption issues; (2) accountability; (3) bureaucracy; (4) opacity of financial operations; (5) lack of support from the national government; and (6) motivation for the reforms.

Generally speaking, the three countries achieved in great successes in the higher education reforms since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, many unsolved problems are in the systems that need to be discussed and solved.

### **Conclusions and Implications for three countries: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan**

- Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan seems to take the directions of democratization of higher education and decentralization of the management system, whereas Uzbekistan higher education system seems to control state universities;
- The structure and higher education network diversified;
- The higher education systems of all three Central Asian countries established new legislation and normative base;
- In all three countries new state standards of higher education have been introduced;

- The similarities in National Tests are the questions of tests. They seem to require the memorization of facts and data rather than critical thinking skills;
- Low level of professional training and in general the trained teachers to develop tests;
- Higher Education system in all three countries are still centralized;
- The number of contract students has been increased in HEIs of all three Central Asian countries.
- To study and analyze the test questions of three countries in order to see the weak points and compare with the entrance Tests of other countries.

## **Section VI**

### **Recommendations and Implications**

#### **■ Integration of HEIs within the three countries:**

- Developing concepts of philanthropy, particular in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.
- Developing network of advanced educators
- Sharing human and material resources based on the experience of Consortium of Five Colleges of Pioneer Valley Area, MA, USA
- The Governments of the three countries may consider providing professional autonomy for HEIs in managing their institutions effectively. This may help in making the educational officials more effective in decision-making.

#### **■ Integration of HEIs in Central Asia**

- Faculty and students exchange educational programs
- Developing standardized tests for HEIs admission
- Developing network of advanced educators
- HEIs officials need to allocate more funds for managing their respective institutions effectively.

#### **■ Integration with Western Higher Education System**

- Developing network of advanced educators
- Faculty and student exchange educational program



## **Lessons Learned**

The following lessons were learned during the process of writing Master's Project.

### **As a Researcher**

The experience of doing this research has developed my awareness about some aspects of the qualitative research. The process of designing this study, collecting and analyzing my data and writing up this project has provided me with experience in making my work meaningful. I have tried to put aside my bias and to avoid judgements. This has helped me to learn how to be neutral and objective in my analysis. It also helped me in the process of comparing and contrasting the higher education system of the three countries of Central Asia and also attempting to see the impact of the new reforms on the education system. It was necessary to set aside my own beliefs, values and biases.

I have also learned a great deal about the historical background of Higher Education System of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and role higher education plays in these countries. Based on this new knowledge, I have discovered a lot of similarities with the higher education system in my country, Kyrgyzstan. These similarities have made my study meaningful and the findings relevant for the implementation in my context. My Master's project helped me to understand the significance and importance of higher education in the improvement of social, political and economic life of the people of these three countries.

The research has taught me to be more realistic, positive and be more open to challenges. This research has provided me the opportunity to identify the research problem and handle it effectively. I do not consider this research to be an end but a means to make contribution to the development of higher education in my country. This study has also opened the door for me as a faculty of one of local universities in Kyrgyzstan for deeply study the National Scholarship Tests of these countries in order to bring suggestions in the content of tests.

### **As a Faculty**

It was a unique experience for me as an overseas program participant to look at what is happening in higher education systems of the three countries of Central Asia and to understand the systems and see to what extent the reforms are different from each

other. I learned that the changes cannot be brought about by just accepting the reforms or declaring the Education Acts, but faculty of the universities should also be an essential part of the whole process implementing the reforms in practice.

I learned that educational officials and faculty with the co-operation of community, can bring changes in higher education systems of their countries. As a university faculty, now I am better able to understand challenges of reform implementation in the three countries of Central Asia. I also learned the challenges each of these three countries facing in implementation of the new reforms after their countries got independence. In addition to this, I learned that not just Ministries of Education of the three countries are leaders but faculty members and school teachers are also leaders; the only thing is to give recognition and appreciation to their commitment and dedication.

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## **Master's Project**

**Kunduz Maksutova**

**M.Ed. candidate in International Education**

**Umass/Amherst, MA, USA**

**Muskie/FSA Fellow (2002-2004)**

## **Consent Form**

Please read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study

The researcher: **Kunduz Maksutova**, a graduate student at School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA.

### **Procedure**

You will be asked to answer the questions that are related to the higher education system reforms in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the form of questionnaire.

### **Confidentiality**

Any personal information that may reveal your identity will be kept secret or anonymous, such as, your name, education place, occupation, location of current job, etc.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You have the ultimate right to deny participating in this study or withdraw from this study after you have agreed to participate at any time of your choice during the study.

You also have right not to answer those questions posed by the researcher that you don't want to give any answer or response.

### **Contacts and Questions**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have any questions later please feel free to contact **Kunduz Maksutova** at **(413) 253-6690** or e-mail at [kmaks@educ.umass.edu](mailto:kmaks@educ.umass.edu).

Please, provide your personal information: Name, Family name, from which year you are in the H.Ed. system of your respected country, your position in your university, the name of your university, please, also indicate if it is private or public (state) institution.

## Interview Questions

1. What do you think about the attitude of Kyrgyz population to the higher education; why they are eager to get higher education despite the economical crisis in the country?
2. How would you comment on the fact of increased number of the higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union; does this phenomenon mean something negative or positive to you?
3. What are the positive and negative sides of the newly created regional universities?
4. How could you comment on the last two years policies of the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Education in terms of “budget” departments and students' reorganizations, National Scholarships Program, Independent Testing Organization for university entrance exams? In what degree these initiatives are reliable and feasible for the current realities of Kyrgyzstan?
5. What are the main obstacles and barriers of ongoing reforms in higher education system of Kyrgyzstan?
6. How do you see the ways of solving the current issues in the higher education of Kyrgyzstan; what kind of methods should be used in order to avoid the problems?
7. What do you think about the “quota” system from the old Soviet times, wasn't it fair system? Do we need to re-introduce this system to the current main higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan?
8. What do you think about the current language policy in the higher education of your country? How do you see the future of language instruction in higher education institutions, would it be monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual? And what is the future of Uzbek language in higher education?
9. What is the contribution of the foreign donor organizations as Soros-Uzbekistan, ACCELS, IREX, TACIS, and others for the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan ? Do they help to improve the system or they lead to the unclear direction?
10. What is the future of the higher education in Kyrgyzstan? Does the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan have promising future or it is unpredictable for you?



11. If you were able to change the current higher education system in your country which of the following systems would you use as a primary model system?

- Western European
- United States
- Soviet Union based
- Current Russia
- None of them but unique for the country
- ?

12. What are the improving points of higher education since the collapse of the Soviet Union?

13. What are the worsening points of higher education of Kyrgyzstan since the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Any additional comments on higher education reform of your country.

Please, try to give as full as possible answers, that will enable me to analyze the data.

**Thank you very much for your time and support!!!**